

'Operation' takes movies to Soldiers downrange

by **Jim Hughes**

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Soldiers downrange may find that movie theaters are in short supply there, but their chances of catching a movie in the near future are looking up thanks to a program begun last year by the parents of a 601st Aviation Support Battalion specialist.

Operation: Take a Soldier to the Movies does just what the name implies, but does it by taking the movies to the Soldiers. The program accepts donations from throughout the U.S. and puts together DVD movie and snack packages to mail to deployed Soldiers.

Bernie and Kathy Hintzke, who live in West Allis, Wis., and whose son, Adam, is a specialist in the 601st Aviation Support Battalion on Bismarck Kaserne, began the program last fall after their involvement with the unit's family readiness group while their son was deployed to Iraq.



"In talking to Adam (while he was deployed), we found that the troops worked long hours in some difficult conditions and they didn't have much time for recreation, or the means," Mr. Hintzke said. "So we wanted to do something to bring them some recreation time."

And bring it to them they did. Between Oct. 31, 2004 and Jan. 10 the Hintzkes and the 601st ASB Family Readiness Group sent more than 5,000 boxes containing a DVD, two microwavable popcorns, movie-style candy, two pre-sweetened drink mixes and letters from donors, all packed up in red and white movie popcorn boxes, to Soldiers downrange, said Pam Lindenmeyer, who served as the FRG's project manager during the initial stages of the program.

"Originally we just sought to raise enough to send to our guys, but it really took off and went across the country," Lindenmeyer said.

"So many donations came in that we started to send to other units that asked for them and individual requests from Soldiers or family members concerned about their Soldiers."

Then, under Jean Flores, the program sent out another 1,000 boxes from March to June. The success far exceeded the expectations of the program's creator.

"The word of our project has been spreading around the U.S. and school, religious groups, civic groups, businesses, etc., have worked on raising and donating the items that go into each movie package," Hintzke said.

While getting their minds off of deployed life and giving them something to do for a couple of hours is a good thing for Soldiers, there is more to it than that, said Spc. John Romancky, a structural aircraft mechanic who was deployed with the 1st Battalion, 1st Aviation Regiment last year and who received a movie package.

"It's good to know that people are thinking of you while you're down there," he said. "It made us pretty happy to get them; they really boosted our spirits."

As is common with anything relating to the military, change has come upon the Take a Soldier to the Movies program. June 28 the operation moved from its original home on Katterbach Kaserne out to Storck Barracks in Illesheim under a new project manager, Crystal Cochran, on behalf of the 2nd Squadron, 6th Cavalry FRG.

"It's a pretty big undertaking, but how big it will be will depend on how active the program is going to be," Cochran said. "There is a lot of interest in this program in Illesheim, which is a good thing because it's going to require a lot of volunteers, organization and energy."

Anyone who'd like to help out with the program should call Cochran at 09846-977-238 to offer their time with the program. People who'd like to donate money, DVDs or other package contents should check out Hintzke's web site, www.soldiertomovies.org for more information on donating to the cause.

"Even though our son is no longer in a war zone, Kathy and I have decided to keep the program organized and going because there are other sons and daughters who are in that war zone and they need to be entertained and supported by us back home," Hintzke said. "It will continue until the people in the U.S. stop supporting it."